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Abriendo Caminos: Clearing the Path to Hispanic Health to receive SNEB 2021 Nutrition Education Program Impact Award

INDIANAPOLIS, IN (August 1, 2021) – The Society for Nutrition Education and Behavior will honor Abriendo Caminos: Clearing the Path to Hispanic Health with the Nutrition Education Program Impact award at the SNEB Annual Conference which will be held virtually August 8-10. The award will be accepted by Dr. Margarita Teran-Garcia, creator of Abriendo Caminos program.

Abriendo Caminos: Clearing the Path to Hispanic Health is a multi-site randomized intervention program that aims to decrease the prevalence of obesity among Hispanic families by providing culturally tailored nutrition, physical activity, and family wellness education. Hispanic families from Illinois, California, Iowa, Texas, and Puerto Rico were recruited and randomized into the intervention arm, which provided them with six weeks of education or a control arm. At least one parent and child were required to attend, but the entire family was encouraged to participate. The nutrition course provided education on portion sizes, fruits, vegetables, proteins and fats, grains, salts, and sugars. The family wellness course focused on the importance of family mealtime, routines, and reducing chaos. Additionally, Abriendo Caminos was able to provide the families with a support network.

By the end of the program, the families were sharing tips to increase their children’s fruit and vegetable intake. The Abriendo Caminos intervention was also effective at improving the diet quality of Hispanic mothers. Aside from providing nutrition education, Abriendo Caminos provided experiential learning opportunities to Hispanic students from disadvantaged backgrounds. The undergraduate students were trained to deliver the Abriendo Caminos curriculum. Additionally, they developed various soft and hard skills to increase their understanding of research. Graduate students were involved in curriculum development, delivery of the program and assisted during undergraduate students' training. Overall, the Abriendo Caminos program has successfully improved dietary patterns and trained future professionals to work and meet the specific needs of the Hispanic population.

Commenting on the findings, Dr. Teran Garcia writes, “There are several interesting findings. Among them, faculty, staff, and students recognized that participating families of Hispanic heritage value the opportunity to learn how to improve their diet quality. The families appreciated that we acknowledge and respect their healthy traditional dietary patterns, and they identify the importance of portion control, healthy lifestyle and community network. Overall, it was significant that parents were empowered to promote healthy changes at home, and in the end, participating families wanted to maintain engagement after the weekly meetings.

We are about to publish on significance for the primary outcome related to childhood obesity prevention for those families (almost 500) participating in the intervention. Still, it was clear that we need more family-based, culturally adapted programs since many of the participating families

had children already in the category of overweight or obesity according to the CDC BMI percentiles for age and sex.”

She also commented on the next phase of the project, “Along with my collaborators, we are working on disseminating all results: from focus groups to quantitative data. In addition, we are training new collaborators across the state of Illinois, implementing adaptations such as web-based delivery, along with evaluation of program impact and satisfaction. One immediate plan is to adapt our family-based program to extend into other underserved or marginalized population groups like recent immigrants from African countries.”

Dr. Margarita Teran-Garcia is the Assistant Dean for Integrated Health Disparities Programs at the University of Illinois Extension and a faculty member of the Division of Nutritional Sciences at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. Her research focuses include health equity, human nutrition, gene-nutrient interactions of humans, and the role of genetics and environmental influences on the development of obesity.

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